



First Impressions Community Exchange

# Petawawa, Ontario

“Full Picture” First Impressions Community Exchange  
FICE Report for Petawawa, Ontario

Prepared By The Municipality of North Grenville Economic Development Department



# What Is A First Impressions Community Exchange?

[OMAFRA First Impressions Community Exchange \(FICE\) Program](#)

- Participating in a Community Exchange allows municipalities to gain insight about how visitors engage and experience their community.
- People who visit your community for the first time can offer fresh perspectives and unique insights about your services, transportation, accommodations and tourist attractions.
- By taking part in this program, you pair up with another community and see what kind of first impressions your community makes when people visit for the first time.
- What you learn can help you find ways to better attract tourists, residents and investors.



# North Grenville To Petawawa

Approximately 2hrs apart by car.  
193 km in distance.

## North Grenville

Population: 17,964 (avg. age 42.6)

Land Area: 351.9km<sup>2</sup>

Private Dwellings: 7,244



## Petawawa

Population: 18,160 (avg. age 34.1)

Land Area: 164.8km<sup>2</sup>

Private Dwellings: 7,174



\* Information collected from 2021 Census data





# Visitor Demographics

Visiting teams ranged in age, gender, culture, mobility, and community involvement.

**Ages:** 25 - 65+

**Number of Participants:** 8 participants, 7 completed surveys.

**Visiting Teams Backgrounds:** Business Owners, BIA Board Member, Board member of the Community Economic Development Advisory Committee, Municipal Council, Municipal Staff, Family/Friends.

**Total Time Spent in Petawawa:** 35+ hours

**Visit Timeframe:** June 14th - July 16th, 2024







# Pre-Visit Knowledge & Expectations

- My father was stationed in Petawawa when I was born... I expect to see lots of military presence.
- A small quiet community with a strong military feel.
- I expect a welcoming community. My husband was stationed here for some time, but I have never been.
- I have only ever driven through Petawawa to visit the Bonnechere caves, I expect to see some of the Ottawa Valley landscape and a strong military influence.



# What Were the First Impressions?

- Beautiful winding roads and scenic drives into the community from some entrances off the 417.
- Visible military influence approaching from the North-West entrance.
- Well used & maintained Multi-Use Pathways (MUPs) with nicely landscaped seating/rest stops.
- Lots of large commercial chains entering from south-east entrance along Petawawa Blvd.
- Lots of mature trees, and greenspace throughout the community.
- Lack of a traditional "downtown core"





# Entrances Into The Community

- **North Entrance ( Paquette) – Excellent**
- **East Entrance (Water) – Good**
- **South Entrance (Doran/ Petawawa Blvd.) – Good**
- **West Entrance (Portage/Murphy) – Good**

## Comments & Feedback

- We found some of the highway signage for the Northern access point confusing, the hierarchy of wording for Paquette Rd was larger than Petawawa.
- The North entrance felt the most developed and catered to visitors to the community. The directional signage was the most robust in terms of wayfinding for tourists. (Accommodations, beaches, museum etc.)
- Directional signage at most entrances were primarily military related.
- The west entrance lacked any meaningful welcoming signage after exiting the highway, however showcased the nature to be found in the community very well.
- There is opportunity at each entrance to amplify wayfinding signage.



The Northern entrance was not the primary route indicated via maps for Google, Apple, or Waze.



# Housing & Residential Areas

“A visual mix of rural, suburban, and medium density housing with ample greenspace”

**Pros:** New build construction and older homes, diversity in home size and types, good access to parks and greenspace.

**Cons:** Not a lot of inventory of homes for sale.

## Observations:

- “Homes appeared to be well maintained”
- “Older neighbourhoods overlooking the water were very appealing.”
- “Great access to parks within walking distance.”
- “Many subdivisions had sidewalks or bike infrastructure. “







# Local Government Services

- Teams shared that the staff at the Municipal Office and Civic Centre was very friendly and willing to share a wealth of information.
- Visitors received community guides, maps, local resources and contact information from municipal staff as needed.
- Teams were able to use the information gathered as resources throughout their visits and identify points of interest.



# Education

Schools and Educational Institutions within the Community

Teams noted that there seemed to be many primary and secondary schools to choose from, noting that there were similar education facilities to our community; Public Schools, Catholic Schools, and a French Catholic School within close proximity to higher education.

## Observations:

- “Valour & St Francis were right next to one another.”
- “Our Lady Sorrows was close in proximity to the church and municipal centre”
- “We were surprised to find that an Algonquin college campus was in close proximity to the community”





# Health, Social & Emergency Services

Teams noticed that there was not a hospital within the community, noting that the closest hospital was in Pembroke.

## Comments & Feedback

- “Lots of dental clinics, physio, massage, etc. After checking online, there seems to be access to family doctors, nurses through the Family Health Center”
- “It looked like there was a medical centre on base, potentially this fills some of the gaps due to no hospital”
- “A strong senior's support network, military family support services, and relocation support (including immigration)”
- “Civitan's and Rotary seem to be very active”
- “The employment office seemed to be pretty large and had good information available online”



There were many options for healthcare, wellness and social support within the community, including active clubs.





# Community Mobility - Streets, Sidewalks & Paths

While getting around Petawawa teams observed that there were a healthy number of cyclists and pedestrians making use of the extensive pathways. Though teams also noted a reliance on vehicles, experiencing some traffic congestion at key times during the day (Noon & 3PM) .

## Roads



Good

## Traffic & Congestion



Some Heavy Traffic at Noon and 3PM

## Active Transportation Infrastructure



Excellent

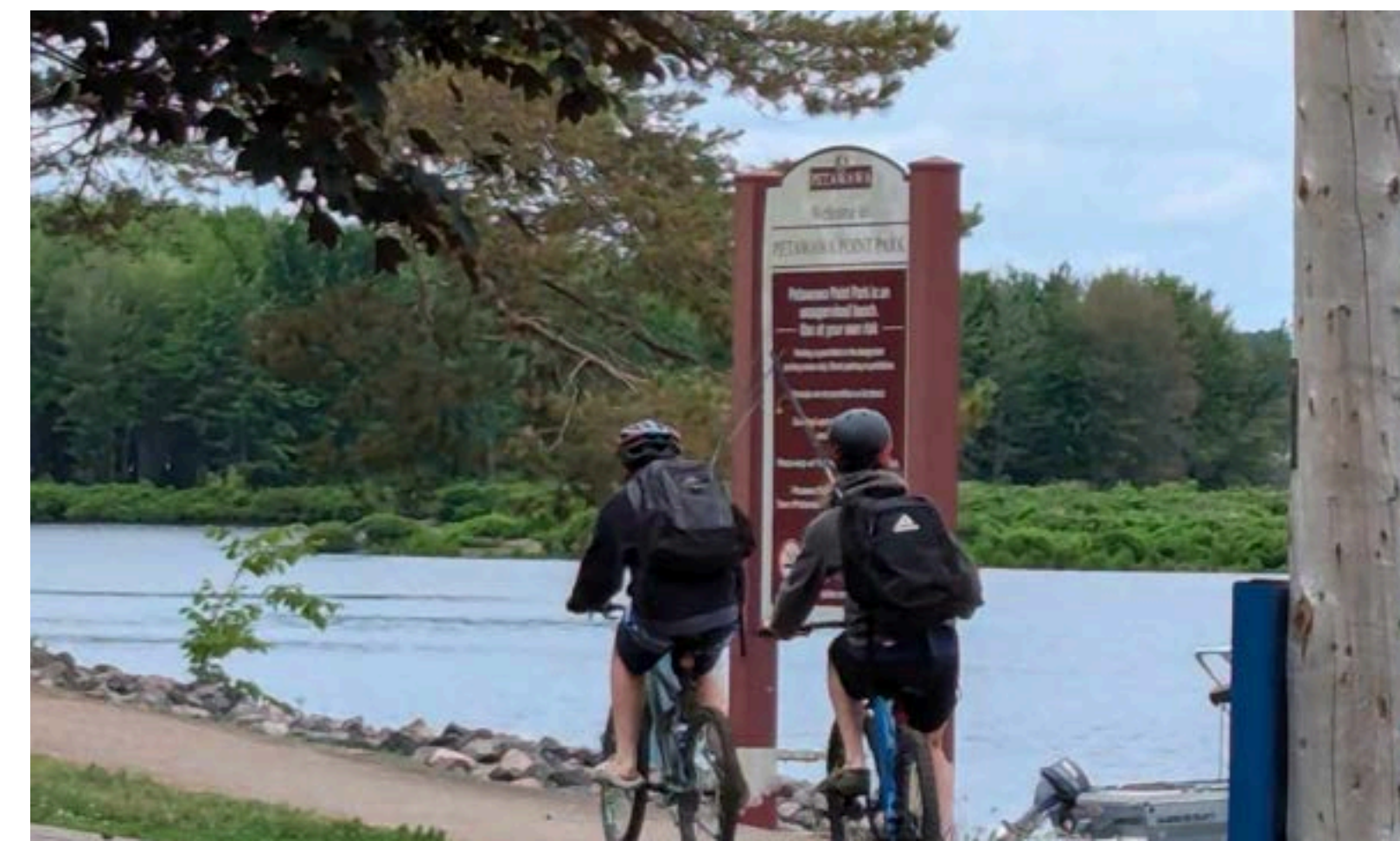
## Sidewalks



Good

## Public Transportation

Not Applicable





# Downtown Appearance

Teams identified Petawawa Blvd as the primary commercial hub “most similar” to a downtown centre.

## Observations:

- “Very nice commercial strip with beautification”
- “Lots of restaurants and unique cuisines to try”
- “Ample parking available, street parking not needed”
- “The small seating areas were a nice addition to placemaking, some had public art installations”
- “A clean and vibrant commercial strip with various business types”
- “Not a super walkable commercial strip, it was very spread out”





# Downtown Impression

Overall, teams enjoyed their time along Petawawa Blvd. Indicating that there were many businesses to visit, and saw beautification efforts such as banners and landscaped seating pavilions scattered along the Blvd.

Some teams noted it was hard to tell if the Blvd is in the process of being established as a more traditional downtown.







# Retail & Services

Teams visited a mix of stores throughout the trips to Petawawa, they found there was a good variety of stores, but not many “mom and pop” retailers in a centralized location. The container market was a great experience for teams that visited during it's operational hours.

## Overall Appearance



## Window Displays



## Store Accessibility



## Customer Service You Received



## Business Signage



\*There were a few instances where teams identified businesses that had a small step to enter or did not have a motorized door. Otherwise, accessibility was good.



# Exploring Businesses & Restaurants

## Business Highlights:

- GearHeads
- Hydra Hobbies and Comics
- Full Spectrum Gear
- Shipping Container Market

## Restaurant Highlights:

- Madameek Lebanese
- Mount Molson Dairy Barn
- Petawawa Pizzeria
- The Shed





# Tourism, Entertainment and Recreation

**Positives:** Great use of proximity to the Ottawa River, well-established signed trails with many recreation opportunities for locals + visitors.

**Opportunities:** Improve wayfinding signage/visibility to locate the tourist attractions within the community.

## Observations:

- "The Key tourism event seemed to be the Water & Dirt Festival"
- "At Petawawa Point Beach we saw families fishing, boaters, and families lounging"
- "The community guide outlined a ton of entertainment and recreation for families"





# Culture & Heritage

Petawawa has two major heritage features that were identified; the military history in the community, and the Heritage Museum. We experienced a very welcoming and friendly demeanor from all residents and even stumbled upon a CFB pride celebration while visiting the Military Museum.

- Welcoming and friendly community culture
- Outdoor enthusiasts – lots of local recommendations for trails and watersports
- Pride in the community's history + military relationship





# Green Space & Parks

The beaches and waterways, the trails, and parks/greenspace within the community were expansive and well developed. Rated very highly across all visiting teams. There were parks and playgrounds suitable for young children and teens, these spaces provided adventures for all ages.

## Impressions & Comments:

- “Natural beauty, parks and trails offer excellent opportunities for hiking, walks, and wildlife observation.”
- “The scenic landscape and well-maintained trails can be very appealing to outdoor enthusiasts”
- “Recreational facilities and outdoor parks/trails appear plentiful, even in residential areas”



Signage throughout parks and greenspace were very well thought out and could be found throughout the community.



# What We Heard From Residents

Some of the recommendations our teams received included where to bring your family, hikes to do and fishing areas; *“Visit Black Bear Campground, Millenium Trail, Petawawa Point park, Law & Orders, Mandameek, Mount Molson”*

On a few occasions we heard...

*“Go to Pembroke if you can’t find it here”*

Residents were happy to share their favourite spot in the neighbouring community.

Overall residents seemed happy living in the community and offered friendship and kindness to visitors, one team member even got life advice from an elderly resident.







# Positive Features



- Beautiful rural area along the Ottawa River
- Exceptional parks and trails
- Friendly residents and staff
- Top notch active transportation infrastructure
- Accessible greenspace
- A clean, quiet community
- Condensed community footprint





# Biggest Obstacles



- Distance from major cities
- Some confusing highway signage
- Nightlife/afterhours activities
- Limited small “mom-and-pop” or “tourist” businesses, specifically retail shops, and cafés.
- Lack of a designated downtown
- Many residents suggested visiting Pembroke for more attractions.



# Quick Wins & Potential Opportunities

- Promote “Shop Local” Campaigns in the stores/restaurants – E.G Window clings, print materials, QR codes.
- Paint/refinish the signs and benches in the parks & at main entrances
- Trim treeline around entryway signage
- Improve wayfinding signage to main attractions
- Continue with beautification efforts along Petawawa Blvd.
- Encourage use of tourism aggregate website directory listings to expand local business and attraction visibility online.
- Find ways to explore opportunities to diversify the local economy beyond its primary industry – such as attracting new business, promoting tourism, and supporting new industries or sectors.





# Contact Us



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To access the FICE resources, please contact the Agricultural information  
Contact Centre at: [1-877-424-1300](tel:1-877-424-1300), or at [ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca](mailto:ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca).